

DAO DE JING

The Classic Book of Integrity and the Way



LAO ZI

TRANSLATION BASED ON THE MAWANGDUI MANUSCRIPTS

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by

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The Way



The ways that can be walked are not the eternal Way.
The names that can be named are not the eternal name.

The nameless is the origin of the myriad creatures.
The named is the mother of the myriad creatures.

Therefore,

Always be without desire
in order to observe its wondrous subtleties.
Always have desire
so that you may observe its manifestations.

Both of these derive from the same source.
They have different names but the same designation.

Mystery of mysteries, the gate of all wonders.

When all under heaven know beauty as beauty,
already there is ugliness.

When everyone knows goodness,
this accounts for badness.

Being and nonbeing give birth to each other.

Difficult and easy complete each other.

Long and short form each other.

High and low fulfill each other.

Tone and voice harmonize with each other.

Front and back follow each other.

It is ever thus.

For these reasons,

The sage

dwells in affairs of nonaction,
carries out a doctrine without words.

He lets the myriad creatures rise up
but does not instigate them.

He acts

but does not presume.

He completes his work
but does not dwell on it.

Now,

simply because he does not dwell on them,
his accomplishments never leave him.

Not exalting men of worth
 prevents the people from competing.

Not putting high value on rare goods
 prevents the people from being bandits.

Not displaying objects of desire
 prevents the people from being disorderly.

For these reasons,
 the sage, in ruling,
 hollows their hearts,
 stuffs their stomachs,
 weakens their wills,
 builds up their bones,
 always causing the people
 to be without knowledge and desire.
He ensures that
 the knowledgeable dare not be hostile
 and that is all.

Thus,
 his rule is universal.

The Way is empty,
 yet never refills with use.
Bottomless it is
 like the forefather of the myriad creatures.
It files away sharp points,
 unravels tangles,
 diffuses light,
 mingles with the dust.
Submerged it lies,
 seeming barely to subsist.
I know not whose child it is,
 only that it resembles the predecessor of God.

Heaven and earth are inhumane.

They view the myriad creatures as straw dogs.

The sage is inhumane.

He views the common people as straw dogs.

The space between heaven and earth,

how like a bellows it is!

Empty but never exhausted,

the more it pumps, the more comes out.

Hearing too much leads to utter exhaustion.

Better to remain in the center.

The valley spirit never dies.
It is called "the mysterious female".

The gate of the mysterious female
is called "the root of heaven and earth".

Gossamer it is,
seemingly insubstantial,
yet never consumed through use.

Heaven is long and earth is lasting.
Heaven and earth can be long and lasting
because they do not live for themselves.

Therefore,
they can be long-lived.

For this reason,
the sage
withdraws himself
but comes to the fore,
alienates himself
but is always present.

Is this not because he is free of private interests?

Therefore,
he can accomplish his private interests.

The highest good is like water.

Water is good at benefiting the myriad creatures
but also struggles to occupy the place
loathed by the masses.

Therefore,
it is near to the Way.

The quality of an abode is in its location.
The quality of the heart is in its depths.
The quality of giving lies in trust.
The quality of correct governance lies in orderly rule.
The quality of an enterprise depends on ability.
The quality of movement depends on timing.

Now,
it is precisely because one does not compete
that there is no blame.

Instead of keeping a bow taut while holding it straight,
better to relax.

You may temper a sword until it is razor sharp,
but you cannot preserve the edge for long.

When gold and jade fill your rooms,
no one will be able to guard them for you.

If wealth and honor make you haughty,
you bequeath misfortune upon yourself.

To withdraw when your work is finished,
that is the Way of heaven.

While you

Cultivate the soul and embrace unity,
can you keep them from separating?

Focus your vital breath until it is supremely soft,
can you be like a baby?

Cleanse the mirror of mysteries,
can you make it free of blemish?

Love the people and enliven the state,
can you do so without cunning?

Open and close the gate of heaven,
can you play the part of the female?

Reach out with clarity in all directions,
can you refrain from action?

It gives birth to them and nurtures them,
It gives birth to them but does not possess them,
It rears them but does not control them.

This is called "mysterious integrity".

Thirty spokes converge on a single hub,
but it is in the space where there is nothing
that the usefulness of the cart lies.

Clay is molded to make a pot,
but it is in the space where there is nothing
that the usefulness of the clay pot lies.

Cut out doors and windows to make a room,
but it is in the spaces where there is nothing
that the usefulness of the room lies.

Therefore,
benefit may be derived from something,
but it is in nothing that we find usefulness.

The five colors
 make a man's eyes blind.
Horse racing and hunting
 make a man's mind go mad.
Goods that are hard to obtain
 make a man's progress falter.
The five flavors
 make a man's palate dull.
The five tones
 make a man's ears deaf.

For these reasons,
 in ruling, the sage
 attends to the stomach, not to the eye.

Therefore,
 he rejects the one and adopts the other.

Being favored is
so disgraceful that it startles.

Being honored is
an affliction as great as one's body.

What is the meaning of
"Being favored is so disgraceful that it startles"?

Favor is debasing.
To find it is startling,
To lose it is startling.

This is the meaning of
"Being favored is so disgraceful that it startles".

What is the meaning of
"Being honored is an affliction as great as one's body"?

The reason I suffer great afflictions is
because I have a body.
If I had no body,
what affliction could I suffer?

Therefore,
When a man puts more emphasis on caring for his body
than on caring for all under heaven,
then all under heaven can be entrusted to him.
When a man is sparing of his body in caring
for all under heaven,
then all under heaven can be delivered to him.

We look for it but do not see it.

 We name it "subtle".

We listen for it but do not hear it.

 We name it "rare".

We grope for it but do not grasp it.

 We name it "serene".

These three cannot be fully fathomed,

Therefore,

 They are bound together to make unity.

Of unity,

 its top is not distant,
 its bottom is not blurred.

Infinitely extended
 and unnameable,

It returns to nonentity.

This is called

 "the form of the formless,
 the image of nonentity".

This is called "the amorphous".

Following behind it,
 you cannot see its back.

Approaching it from the front,
 you cannot see its head.

Hold to the Way of today
 to manage the actualities of today,
 thereby understanding the primeval beginning.

This is called "the thread of the Way".

Those of old who were adept in the Way
 were subtly profound and mysteriously perceptive.
So deep,
 they could not be recognized.

Now,

Because they could not be recognized,
one can describe their appearance only with effort:
 hesitant,
 as though crossing a stream in winter,
 cautious,
 as though fearful of their neighbors all around,
 solemn,
 as though guests in someone else's house,
 shrinking,
 as ice when it melts,
 plain,
 as an unhewn log,
 muddled,
 as turbid waters,
 expansive,
 as a broad valley.

If turbid waters are stilled,
 they will gradually become clear.
If something inert is set in motion,
 it will gradually come to life.

Those who preserved this Way did not wish to be full.

Now,

simply because they did not wish to be full,
 they could be threadbare and incomplete.

Attain utmost emptiness.
Maintain utter stillness.

The myriad creatures arise side by side,
thus I observe their renewal.

Heaven's creatures abound,
but each returns to its roots,
which is called "stillness".

This is termed "renewal of fate".

Renewal of fate is perpetual.

To know the perpetual is to be enlightened.

Not to know the perpetual is to be reckless.
Recklessness breeds evil.

To know the perpetual is to be tolerant.
Tolerance leads to ducal impartiality,
ducal impartiality to kingliness,
kingliness to heaven,
heaven to the Way,
the Way to permanence.

To the end of his days,
he will not be imperiled.

Preeminent is one whose subjects barely know he exists.
The next is one to whom they feel close and praise.
The next is one whom they fear.
The lowest is one whom they despise.

When the ruler's trust is wanting,
 there will be no trust in him.

Cautious,
 he values his words.

When his work is completed and his affairs finished,
 the common people say,
 "We are like this by ourselves".

Therefore,

When the great Way was forsaken,
there was humaneness and righteousness.

When cunning and wit appeared,
there was great falsity.

When the six family relationships lacked harmony,
there were filial piety and parental kindness.

When the state and royal house were in disarray,
there were upright ministers.

Abolish sagehood and abandon cunning,
the people will benefit a hundredfold.

Abolish humaneness and abandon righteousness,
the people will once again be filial and kind.

Abolish cleverness and abandon profit,
bandits and thieves will be no more.

These three statements are inadequate as a civilizing doctrine.

Therefore,

Let something be added to them:

Evince the plainness of undyed silk.
Embrace the simplicity of the unhewn log.
Lessen selfishness.
Diminish desires.
Abolish learning
and you will be without worries.

Between "yes sir" and "certainly not",
how much difference is there?

Between beauty and ugliness,
how great is the distinction?

He whom others fear,
likewise cannot but fear others.

How confusing,
there is no end to it all!

Joyful are the masses,
as though feasting after the great sacrifice of oxen,
or mounting a terrace in spring.

Motionless am I,
without any sign, as a baby that has yet to gurgle.

How dejected!
as though having nowhere to return.

The masses all have more than enough.
I alone am bereft.

I have the heart of a fool.
How muddled!

The ordinary man is luminously clear.
I alone seem confused.
The ordinary man is searchingly exact.
I alone am vague and uncertain.

How nebulous as the ocean.
How blurred as though without boundary.

The masses all have a purpose,
I alone am stubborn and uncouth.

I desire to be uniquely different from others
by honoring the mother who nourishes.

The appearance of grand integrity
is that it follows the Way alone.

The Way objectified
is blurred and nebulous.

How nebulous and blurred!
Yet within it there are images.

How blurred and nebulous!
Yet within it there are objects.

How cavernous and dark!
Yet within it there is an essence.
Its essence is quite real.
Within it there are tokens.

From the present back to the past,
its name has been imperishable.

Through it we conform to the father of the masses.

How do I know what the father of the masses is like?
Through this.

If it

Is bent,
it will be preserved intact.
Is crooked,
it will be straightened.
Is sunken,
it will be filled.
Is worn-out,
it will be renewed.
Has little,
it will gain.
Has much,
it will be confused.

For these reasons,

The sage holds on to unity
and serves as the shepherd of all under heaven.
He is not self-absorbed,
therefore he shines forth.
He is not self-revealing,
therefore he is distinguished.
He is not self-assertive,
therefore he has merit.
He does not praise himself,
therefore he is long-lasting.

Now,

Simply because he does not compete,
no one can compete with him.

The old saying about the bent being preserved intact
is indeed close to the mark!

Truly, he shall be returned intact.

To be sparing of speech is natural.

A whirlwind does not last the whole morning.

A downpour does not last the whole day.

Who causes them?

If even heaven and earth cannot cause them to persist,
how much less can human beings?

Therefore,

In pursuing his affairs,

a man of the Way identifies with the Way,
a man of integrity identifies with integrity,
a man who fails identifies with failure.

To him who identifies with integrity,
the Way awards integrity.

To him who identifies with failure,
the Way awards failure.

Who is puffed up cannot stand.
Who is self-absorbed has no distinction.
Who is self-revealing does not shine.
Who is self-assertive has no merit.
Who is self-praising does not last long.

As for the Way, we may say these are
"excess provisions and extra baggage".

Creation abhors such extravagances.

Therefore,
one who aspires to the Way
does not abide in them.

There was something featureless yet complete,
 born before heaven and earth.
Silent, amorphous,
 it stood alone and unchanging.

We may regard it as the mother of heaven and earth.

Not knowing its name,
 I style it the "Way".
If forced to give it a name,
 I would call it "great".

Being great implies flowing ever onward.
Flowing ever onward implies far-reaching.
Far-reaching implies reversal.

The Way is great.
Heaven is great.
Earth is great.
The king, too, is great.

Within the realm there are four greats
 and the king is one among them.

Man patterns himself on earth.
Earth patterns itself on heaven.
Heaven patterns itself on the Way.
The Way patterns itself on nature.

Heavy is the root of light.
Calm is the ruler of haste.

For these reasons,

The superior man may travel the whole day
without leaving his heavy baggage cart.
Though inside the courtyard walls of a noisy inn,
he placidly rises above it all.

How then should a king with ten thousand chariots
conduct himself lightly before all under heaven?

If he treats himself lightly,
he will lose the taproot.

If he is hasty,
he will lose the rulership.

He who is skilled at traveling
leaves neither tracks nor traces.
He who is skilled at speaking
is flawless in his delivery.
He who is skilled in computation
uses neither tallies nor counters.
He who is skilled at closing things tightly
has neither lock nor key,
but what he closes cannot be opened.
He who is good at binding
has neither cord nor string,
but what he binds cannot be untied.

For these reasons,
the sage
is always skilled at saving others
and does not abandon them,
nor does he abandon resources.
This is called "inner intelligence".

Therefore,
Good men are teachers for the good man.
Bad men are foils for the good man.
He who values not his teacher
and loves not his foil,
though he be knowledgeable,
is greatly deluded.

This is called "the wondrous essential".

Know masculinity.
Maintain femininity,
 and be a ravine for all under heaven.
By being a ravine for all under heaven,
 eternal integrity will never desert you.
If eternal integrity never deserts you,
 you will return to the state of infancy.

Know you are innocent.
Remain steadfast when insulted
 and be a valley for all under heaven.
By being a valley for all under heaven,
 eternal integrity will suffice.
If eternal integrity suffices,
 you will return to the simplicity of the unhewn log.

Know whiteness.
Maintain blackness,
 and be a model for all under heaven.
By being a model for all under heaven,
 eternal integrity will not err.
If eternal integrity does not err,
 you will return to infinity.

When the unhewn log is sawn apart,
 it is made into tools.
When the sage is put to use,
 he becomes the chief of officials.

For
 great carving does no cutting.

Of those who wish to take hold of all-under-heaven
and act upon it,
I have seen that they do not succeed.

Now,

All-under-heaven is a sacred vessel,
Not something that can be acted upon.
Who acts upon it will be defeated.
Who grasps it will lose it.

Of creatures,

some march forward, others follow behind.
some are shiveringly silent, others are all puffed up.
some are strong, others are meek.
some pile up, others collapse.

For these reasons,

the sage
rejects extremes,
rejects excess,
rejects extravagance.

One who assists the ruler of men with the Way
does not use force of arms against all under heaven.
Such a course is likely to boomerang.

Where armies have been stationed,
briars and brambles will grow.

A good general fulfills his purpose
and that is all.

He does not use force
to seize for himself.

He fulfills his purpose
but is not proud.

He fulfills his purpose
but is not boastful.

He fulfills his purpose
but does not brag.

He fulfills his purpose
only because he has no other choice.

This is called "fulfilling one's purpose without using force".

If something grows old while still in its prime,
this is called "not being in accord with the Way".

Not being in accord with the Way
leads to an early demise.

Now,

Weapons are instruments of evil omen.
Creation abhors them.

Therefore,

One who aspires to the Way
does not abide in them.
The superior man
at home honors the left,
on the battlefield honors the right.

Therefore,

Weapons are not instruments of the superior man.
Weapons are instruments of evil omen
to be used only when there is no other choice.
He places placidity above all
and refuses to prettify weapons.
If one prettifies weapons,
this is to delight in the killing of others.

Now,

One who delights in the killing of others
cannot exercise his will over all under heaven.

For this reason,

On occasions for celebration,
the left is given priority.
On occasions for mourning,
the right is given priority.

Therefore,

A deputy general stands on the left.
The general-in-chief stands on the right.

In other words,

They stand in accordance with mourning ritual.
The killing of masses of human beings,
we bewail with sorrow and grief.
Victory in battle,
we commemorate with mourning ritual.

The Way is eternally nameless.

Though the unhewn log is small,
no one in the world dares subjugate it.
If feudal lords and kings could maintain it,
the myriad creatures would submit of themselves.

Heaven and earth unite
to suffuse sweet dew.
Without commanding the people,
equality will naturally ensue.

As soon as one begins to divide things up,
there are names.
Once there are names,
one should also know when to stop.
Knowing when to stop,
one thereby avoids peril.

In metaphorical terms,
the relationship of all under heaven to the Way
is like that of valley streams
to the river and sea.

Understanding others is knowledge.
Understanding oneself is enlightenment.

Conquering others is power.
Conquering oneself is strength.

Contentment is wealth.

Forceful conduct is willfulness.

Not losing one's rightful place is to endure.

To die but not be forgotten is longevity.

Rippling is the Way, flowing left and right.
Its tasks completed, its affairs finished,
 still it does not claim them for its own.
The myriad creatures return to it,
 but it does not act as their ruler.

Eternally without desire,
 it may be named among the small.
The myriad creatures return to it,
 but it does not act as their ruler.
It may be named among the great.

For these reasons,
 the sage can achieve greatness,
 because he does not act great.

Therefore,
 he can achieve greatness.

Hold fast to the great image
and all under heaven will come.

They will
come but not be harmed,
rest in safety and peace.

Music and fine food
will make the passerby halt.

Therefore,

When the Way is expressed verbally,
We say such things as
"how bland and tasteless it is!"

"We look for it,
but there is not enough to be seen."

"We listen for it,
but there is not enough to be heard."

Yet, when put to use,
it is inexhaustible!

When you wish to contract something,
you must momentarily expand it.

When you wish to weaken something,
you must momentarily strengthen it.

When you wish to reject something,
you must momentarily join with it.

When you wish to seize something,
you must momentarily give it up.

This is called "subtle insight".

The soft and weak conquer the strong.

Fish cannot be removed from the watery depths.

The profitable instruments of state
cannot be shown to the people.

The Way is eternally nameless.

If feudal lords and kings preserve it,
the myriad creatures will be transformed by themselves.

After transformation,
if they wish to rise up,

I shall restrain them with the nameless unhewn log.
By restraining them with the nameless unhewn log,

they will not feel disgraced.
Not feeling disgraced,

they will be still.

Whereupon,
heaven and earth will be made right by themselves.

Integrity

德
心

The person of superior integrity
 does not insist upon his integrity.
 For this reason, he has integrity.

The person of inferior integrity
 never loses sight of his integrity.
 For this reason, he lacks integrity.

The person of superior integrity takes no action,
 nor has he a purpose for acting.

The person of superior humaneness takes action,
 but has no purpose for acting.

The person of superior righteousness takes action,
 and has a purpose for acting.

The person of superior etiquette takes action,
 but others do not respond to him.

Whereupon he rolls up his sleeves
 and coerces them.

Therefore,

When the Way is lost,
 afterward comes integrity.

When integrity is lost,
 afterward comes humaneness.

When humaneness is lost,
 afterward comes righteousness.

When righteousness is lost,
 afterward comes etiquette.

Now,

Etiquette is the attenuation of trustworthiness,
 and the source of disorder.

Foreknowledge is but the blossomy ornament of the Way,
 and the source of ignorance.

For this reason,

The great man resides in substance,
 not in attenuation.

He resides in fruitful reality,
 not in blossomy ornament.

Therefore,
 He rejects the one and adopts the other.

In olden times, these attained unity:

Heaven attained unity,
and thereby became pure.

Earth attained unity,
and thereby became tranquil.

The spirits attained unity,
and thereby became divine.

The valley attained unity,
and thereby became full.

Feudal lords and kings attained unity,
and thereby all was put right.

Yet, pushed to the extreme,

It implies that,
if heaven were ever pure,
it would be likely to rend.

It implies that,
if earth were ever tranquil,
it would be likely to quake.

It implies that,
if the spirits were ever divine,
they would be likely to dissipate.

It implies that,
if the valley were ever full,
it would be likely to run dry.

It implies that,
if feudal lords and kings were ever noble
and thereby exalted,
they would be likely to fall.

Therefore,

It is necessary to be noble,
and yet take humility as a basis.

It is necessary to be exalted,
and yet take modesty as a foundation.

Now, for this reason,

Feudal lords and kings style themselves
"orphaned," "destitute," and "hapless".

Is this not because they take humility as their basis?

Therefore,
striving for an excess of praise,
one ends up without praise.

Consequently
sesire not to be jingling as jade
nor stolid as stone.

Reversal is the movement of the Way.
Weakness is the usage of the Way.

All creatures under heaven are born from being.
Being is born from nonbeing.

When the superior man hears the Way,
 he is scarcely able to put it into practice.
When the middling man hears the Way,
 he appears now to preserve it, now to lose it.
When the inferior man hears the Way,
 he laughs at it loudly.
If he did not laugh,
 it would not be fit to be the Way.

For this reason,
There is a series of epigrams that says:
"The bright Way seems dim.
The forward Way seems backward.
The level Way seems bumpy.
Superior integrity seems like a valley.
The greatest whiteness seems grimy.
Ample integrity seems insufficient.
Robust integrity seems apathetic.
Plain truth seems sullied.

The great square has no corners.
The great vessel is never completed.
The great note sounds muted.
The great image has no form.

The Way is concealed and has no name."

Indeed,
the Way alone is good at beginning
and good at completing.

The Way gave birth to unity.
Unity gave birth to duality.
Duality gave birth to trinity.
Trinity gave birth to the myriad creatures.

The myriad creatures bear yin on their backs
and embrace yang in their bosoms.
They neutralize these vapors
and thereby achieve harmony.

That which all under heaven hate most
is to be orphaned, destitute, and hapless.
Yet kings and dukes call themselves thus.

Things may be diminished by being increased,
increased by being diminished.

Therefore,
that which people teach,
after deliberation, I also teach people.

Therefore,
"The tyrant does not die a natural death."
I take this as my mentor.

The softest thing under heaven
gallops triumphantly over
the hardest thing under heaven.

Nonbeing penetrates nonspace.

Hence,
I know the advantages of nonaction.

The doctrine without words,
the advantage of nonaction,
few under heaven can realize these!

Name or person,
which is nearer?

Person or property,
which is dearer?

Gain or loss,
which is drearier?

Many loves entail great costs.

Many riches entail heavy losses.

Know contentment and you shall not be disgraced.

Know satisfaction and you shall not be imperiled.

Then you will long endure.

Great perfection appears defective,
but its usefulness is not diminished.
Great fullness appears empty,
but its usefulness is not impaired.

Great straightness seems crooked.
Great cleverness seems clumsy.
Great triumph seems awkward.

Bustling about vanquishes cold,
Standing still vanquishes heat.

Pure and still,
one can put things right everywhere under heaven.

When the Way prevails under heaven,
 swift horses are relegated to fertilizing fields.
When the Way does not prevail under heaven,
 war-horses breed in the suburbs.

No guilt is greater than giving in to desire.
No disaster is greater than discontent.
No crime is more grievous than the desire for gain.

Therefore,
 contentment that derives from knowing
 when to be content
 is eternal contentment.

Without going out-of-doors,
one may know all under heaven.

Without peering through windows,
one may know the Way of heaven.

The farther one goes,
the less one knows.

For this reason,
the sage knows without journeying,
understands without looking,
accomplishes without acting.

The pursuit of learning results in daily increase.
Hearing the Way leads to daily decrease.

Decrease and again decrease,
until you reach nonaction.
Through nonaction,
no action is left undone.

Should one desire to gain all under heaven,
one should remain ever free of involvements.

For,
just as surely as one becomes involved,
one is unfit for gaining all under heaven.

The sage never has a mind of his own.
He considers the minds of the common people to be his mind.

Treat well those who are good.
Also treat well those who are not good.
Thus is goodness attained.

Be sincere to those who are sincere.
Also be sincere to those who are insincere.
Thus is sincerity attained.

The sage
is self-effacing in his dealings with all under heaven
and bemuddles his mind for the sake of all under heaven.

The common people
all rivet their eyes and ears upon him
and the sage makes them all chuckle like children.

A person comes forth to life and enters into death.
Three out of ten are partners of life.
Three out of ten are partners of death.
And the people,

whose every movement leads them to the land of death,
because they cling to life,
are also three out of ten.

Now,

What is the reason for this?
It is because they cling to life.

Indeed,

I have heard that
one who is good at preserving life
does not avoid tigers and rhinoceroses
when he walks in the hills,
nor does he put on armor and take up weapons
when he enters a battle.

The rhinoceros has no place to jab its horn.
The tiger has no place to fasten its claws.
Weapons have no place to admit their blades.

Now,

What is the reason for this?
Because on him there are no mortal spots.

The Way gives birth to them and integrity nurtures them.
Matter forms them and function completes them.

For this reason,

The myriad creatures respect the Way
and esteem integrity.

Respect for the Way and esteem for integrity
are by no means conferred upon them
but always occur naturally.

The Way gives birth to them,
nurtures them,
rears them,
follows them,
shelters them,
toughens them,
sustains them,
protects them.

It gives birth but does not possess,
acts but does not presume,
rears but does not control.

This is what is called "mysterious integrity".

Everything under heaven has a beginning,
which may be thought of as the mother
of all under heaven.

Having realized the mother,
you thereby know her children.

Knowing her children,
go back to abide with the mother.

To the end of your life,
you will not be imperiled.

Stopple the orifices of your hear,
close your doors,
your whole life you will not suffer.

Open the gate of your heart,
meddle with affairs,
your whole life you will be beyond salvation.

Seeing what is small is called insight,
Abiding in softness is called strength.

Use your light to return to insight,
Be not an inheritor of personal calamity.

This is called "following the constant".

If I were possessed of the slightest knowledge,
traveling on the great Way,
my only fear would be to go astray.

The great Way is quite level,
but the people are much enamored of mountain trails.

The court is thoroughly deserted.
The fields are choked with weeds.
The granaries are altogether empty.

Still there are some who
wear clothes with fancy designs and brilliant colors,
sharp swords hanging at their sides,
are sated with food,
overflowing with possessions and wealth.

This is called "the brazenness of a bandit".
The brazenness of a bandit is surely not the Way!

What is firmly established cannot be uprooted.
What is tightly embraced cannot slip away.

Thus sacrificial offerings made by sons and grandsons
will never end.

Cultivated in the person, integrity is true.
Cultivated in the family, integrity is ample.
Cultivated in the village, integrity lasts long.
Cultivated in the state, integrity is abundant.
Cultivated everywhere under heaven, integrity is vast.

Observe other persons through your own person.
Observe other families through your own family.
Observe other villages through your own village.
Observe other states through your own state.
Observe all under heaven through all under heaven.

How do I know the nature of all under heaven?
Through this.

He who embodies the fullness of integrity
is like a ruddy infant.

Wasps, spiders, scorpions, and snakes
will not sting or bite him.
Rapacious birds and fierce beasts
will not seize him.

His bones are weak and his sinews soft,
yet his grip is tight.
He knows not the joining of male and female,
yet his penis is aroused.
His essence has reached a peak.

He screams the whole day without becoming hoarse.
His harmony has reached perfection.

Harmony implies constancy.
Constancy requires insight.

Striving to increase one's life is ominous.
To control the vital breath with one's mind entails force.

Something that grows old while still in its prime
is said to be not in accord with the Way.
Not being in accord with the Way
leads to an early demise.

One who knows does not speak.
One who speaks does not know.

He

stopples the openings of his heart,
closes his doors,
diffuses the light,
mingles with the dust,
files away his sharp points,
unravels his tangles.

This is called "mysterious identity".

Therefore,

neither can one attain intimacy with him,
nor can one remain distant from him,
neither can one profit from him,
nor can one be harmed by him,
neither can one achieve honor through him,
nor can one be debased by him.

Therefore,

he is esteemed by all under heaven.

Rule the state with uprightness.
Deploy your troops with craft.
Gain all under heaven with noninterference.

How do I know this is actually so?

Now,

The more taboos under heaven,
 the poorer the people.
The more clever devices people have,
 the more confused the state and ruling house.
The more knowledge people have,
 the more strange things spring up.
The more legal affairs are given prominence, the more
 numerous bandits and thieves.

For this reason,

the sage has a saying:
 "I take no action,
 yet the people transform themselves.
I am fond of stillness,
 yet the people correct themselves.
I do not interfere in affairs,
 yet the people enrich themselves.
I desire not to desire,
 yet the people of themselves become
 simple as unhewn logs."

When government is anarchic,
the people are honest.

When government is meddlesome,
the state is lacking.

Disaster is that whereon good fortune depends.

Good fortune is that wherein disaster lurks.

Who knows their limits?

When there is no uprightness,
correct reverts to crafty,
good reverts to gruesome.

The delusion of mankind,
how long have been its days!

For this reason, be
square but not cutting,
angular but not prickly,
straight but not arrogant,
bright but not dazzling.

To rule men and serve heaven,
there is nothing like thrift.

Now,

Only through thrift
can one be prepared.

Being prepared
means having a heavy store of integrity.
With a heavy store of integrity,
he can overcome everything.

Able to overcome everything,
no one knows his limits.

If no one knows his limits,
he can have the kingdom.

Having the mother of the kingdom,
he can long endure.

This is called "sinking roots firm and deep,
the Way of long life and lasting vision".

Ruling a big kingdom is like cooking a small fish.

If one oversees all under heaven in accord with the Way,
demons have no spirit.

It is not that the demons have no spirit,
but that their spirits do not harm people.

It is not merely that their spirits do not harm people,
but that the sage also does not harm them.

Now,
when neither harms the other,
integrity accrues to both.

A large state is like a low-lying estuary,
the female of all under heaven.

In the congress of all under heaven,
the female always conquers the male through her stillness.

Because she is still,
it is fitting for her to lie low.

By lying beneath a small state,
a large state can take over a small state.

By lying beneath a large state,
a small state can be taken over by a large state.

Therefore,

one may either take over or be taken over by lying low.

Therefore,

The large state wishes only to annex and nurture others.
The small state wants only to join with and serve others.

Now,

Since both get what they want,
it is fitting for the large state to lie low.

The Way is the cistern of the myriad creatures.
It is the treasure of the good man,
and that which is treasured by the bad man.

Beautiful words can be traded.
Noble deeds can be used as gifts for others.
Why should we reject even what is bad about men?

Therefore,
when the son of heaven is enthroned,
or the three ministers are installed,
although they may have large jade disks
and be preceded by teams of four horses,
it would be better for them to sit down
and make progress in this.

What was the reason for the ancients
to value this so highly?

Did they not say:
"Seek and thou shalt receive.
Sin and thou shalt be forgiven"?

Therefore,
it is valued by all under heaven.

Act through nonaction.
Handle affairs through noninterference.
Taste what has no taste.
Regard the small as great, the few as many.
Repay resentment with integrity.

Undertake difficult tasks
 by approaching what is easy in them.
Do great deeds
 by focusing on their minute aspects.

All difficulties under heaven arise from what is easy.
All great things under heaven arise from what is minute.

For this reason,
 the sage never strives to do what is great.

Therefore,
 He can achieve greatness.

One who lightly assents
 will seldom be believed.
One who thinks everything is easy
 will encounter much difficulty.

For this reason,
 even the sage considers things difficult.

Therefore,
 in the end he is without difficulty.

What is secure is easily grasped.
What has no omens is easily forestalled.
What is brittle is easily split.
What is minuscule is easily dispersed.

Act before there is a problem.
Bring order before there is disorder.

A tree that fills the arms' embrace
 is born from a downy shoot.
A terrace nine layers high
 starts from a basketful of earth.
An ascent of a hundred strides
 begins beneath one's foot.

Who acts fails.
Who grasps loses.

For this reason,
 the sage does not act.

Therefore,
 He does not fail.
 He does not grasp.

Therefore,
 He does not lose.

In pursuing their affairs,
 people often fail when they are close to success.

Therefore,
 if one is as cautious at the end as at the beginning,
 there will be no failures.

For this reason,
 The sage desires to be without desire
 and does not prize goods that are hard to obtain.
 He learns not to learn
 and reverts to what the masses pass by.

Thus,

he can help the myriad creatures be natural,
but dares not act.

The ancients who practiced the Way
did not enlighten the people with it.
They used it, rather, to stupefy them.

The people are hard to rule
because they have too much knowledge.

Therefore,
Ruling a state through knowledge
is to rob the state.
Ruling a state through ignorance
brings integrity to the state.

One who is always mindful of these two types
grasps a paradigm.

Mindfulness of this paradigm is called "mysterious integrity".

Deep and distant is this mysterious integrity.
It runs counter to things
until it reaches the great confluence.

The river and sea can be kings
of the hundred valley streams
because they are good at lying below them.

For this reason,
they can be kings of the hundred valley streams.

For this reason, too,
If the sage wants to be above the people,
in his words, he must put himself below them.
If he wishes to be before the people,
in his person, he must stand behind them.

Therefore,
He is situated in front of the people,
but they are not offended.
He is situated above the people,
but they do not consider him a burden.
All under heaven happily push him forward without
wearying.
Is this not because he is without contention?

Therefore,
no one under heaven can contend with him.

All under heaven say that I am great,
great but unconventional.

Now,

Precisely because I am unconventional,
I can be great.
If I were conventional,
I would long since have become a trifle.

I have always possessed three treasures
that I guard and cherish.

The first is compassion.

The second is frugality.

The third is not daring to be ahead of all under heaven.

Now,

Because I am compassionate,
I can be brave.

Because I am frugal,
I can be magnanimous.

Because I dare not be ahead of all under heaven,
I can be a leader in the completion of affairs.

If, today, I were to

be courageous while forsaking compassion,
be magnanimous while forsaking frugality,
get ahead while forsaking the hindmost,
that would be death!

For compassion

In war brings victory.
In defense brings invulnerability.

Whomsoever heaven would establish,
it surrounds with a bulwark of compassion.

A good warrior is not bellicose.

A good fighter does not anger.

A good conqueror does not contest his enemy.

One who is good at using others puts himself below them.

This is called "integrity without competition".

This is called "using others".

This is called "parity with heaven", the pinnacle of the ancients.

The strategists have a saying:

"I dare not be host,
but would rather be guest.
I advance not an inch,
but instead retreat a foot".

This is called

Marching without ranks.
Bearing nonexistent arms.
Flourishing nonexistent weapons.
Driving back nonexistent enemies.

There is no greater misfortune

than not having a worthy foe.

Once I believe there are no worthy foes,

I have well-nigh forfeited my treasures.

Therefore,

when opposing forces are evenly matched,
the one who is saddened will be victorious.

My words are

very easy to understand,
very easy to practice,
but no one is able to understand them,
and no one is able to practice them.

Words have authority.

Affairs have an ancestry.

It is simply because of their ignorance,
that they do not understand me.

Those who understand me are few,
thus I am ennobled.

For this reason,

the sage wears coarse clothing over his shoulders
but carries jade within his bosom.

To realize that you do not understand is a virtue.
Not to realize that you do not understand is a defect.

The reason why
the sage has no defects
is because he treats defects as defects.

Thus,
he has no defects.

When the people do not fear the majestic,
great majesty will soon visit them.

Do not limit their dwellings.
Do not suppress their livelihood.
Simply because you do not suppress them,
they will not grow weary of you.

For this reason,
The sage is self-aware
 but does not flaunt himself.
He is self-devoted
 but does not glorify himself.

Therefore,
he rejects the one and adopts the other.

He who is brave in daring will be killed.
He who is brave in not daring will survive.
One of these two courses is beneficial.
The other is harmful.

Who knows the reason for heaven's dislikes?

The Way of heaven
 does not war
 yet is good at conquering,
 does not speak
 yet is good at answering,
is not summoned
 yet comes of itself,
is relaxed
 yet good at making plans.

Heaven's net is vast.
Though its meshes are wide, nothing escapes.

If the people never fear death,
 what is the purpose of threatening to kill them?
If the people ever fear death,
 and I were to capture and kill those who are devious,
 who would dare to be so?
If the people must be ever fearful of death,
 then there will always be an executioner.

Now,
 to kill in place of the executioner is like
 hewing wood in place of the master carpenter.
Few indeed will escape cutting their own hands.

Human hunger is
the result of overtaxation.

For this reason,
there is hunger.

The common people are not governable
because of their superiors' actions.

For this reason,
they are not governable.

The people make light of death,
because of too much emphasis on the quest for life.

For this reason,
they make light of death.

Now,
only she who acts not for the sake of life
is wiser than those who value life highly.

Human beings are
soft and supple when alive,
stiff and straight when dead.

The myriad creatures, the grasses, and trees are
soft and fragile when alive,
dry and withered when dead.

Therefore, it is said:

The rigid person is a disciple of death.
The soft, supple, and delicate are lovers of life.

An army that is inflexible will not conquer.
A tree that is inflexible will snap.

The unyielding and mighty shall be brought low.
The soft, supple, and delicate will be set above.

The Way of heaven is like the bending of a bow.

The upper part is pressed down.

The lower part is raised up.

The part that has too much is reduced.

The part that has too little is increased.

Therefore,

The Way of heaven

reduces surplus to make up for scarcity.

The Way of man

reduces scarcity and pays tribute to surplus.

Who is there that can have a surplus

and take from it to pay tribute to heaven?

Surely only one who has the Way.

For this reason,

The sage

acts but does not possess,

completes his work but does not dwell on it.

In this fashion,

he has no desire to display his worth.

Nothing under heaven is softer or weaker than water,
and yet nothing is better
for attacking what is hard and strong,
because of its immutability.

The defeat of the hard by the soft,
the defeat of the strong by the weak,
this is known to all under heaven,
yet no one is able to practice it.

Therefore, in the words of the sage, it is said:

"He who bears abuse directed against the state is called
'lord of the altars for the gods of soil and grain'.
He who bears the misfortunes of the state is called
the 'king of all under heaven'".

True words seem contradictory.

Compromise with great resentment
 will surely yield lingering resentment.
How can this be seen as good?

For this reason,
 the sage holds the debtor's side of a contract
 and does not make claims upon others.

Therefore,
 The man of integrity attends to his debts.
 The man without integrity attends to his exactions.

The Way of heaven is impartial,
 yet is always with the good person.

Let there be a small state with few people,
 where military devices find no use.

Let the people look solemnly upon death,
 and banish the thought of moving elsewhere.

They may have carts and boats,
 but there is no reason to ride them.

They may have armor and weapons,
 but they have no reason to display them.

Let the people go back to tying knots
 to keep records.

Let their food be savory,
their clothes beautiful,
their customs pleasurable,
their dwellings secure.

Though they may gaze across at a neighboring state,
 and hear the sounds of its dogs and chickens,
 the people will never travel back and forth,
 till they die of old age.

Sincere words are not beautiful.
Beautiful words are not sincere.

Jordan B Peterson - September 23, 2018
He who knows is not learned.

He who is learned does not know.
He who is good does not have much.
He who has much is not good.

The sage does not hoard.
The more he does for others,
 the more he has himself.
The more he gives to others,
 the more his own bounty increases.

Therefore,
 The Way of heaven benefits but does not harm.
 The Way of man acts but does not contend.